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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: ONGOING POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN CDC PARTY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. A month-long power struggle inside Liberia's most popular opposition party, the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), was not resolved at National Elections Commission (NEC) hearing, and the case has been sent to the Supreme Court. If there is no solution before the CDC's 2009 annual convention, the party risks being split in two. CDC Secretary General announced March 24 that Acting Chairman Joshua Sackie had resigned and been replaced by Geraldine Doe-Sheriff. Sackie says he never resigned and therefore is still in charge. Former CDC presidential candidate and soccer star George Weah has publicly supported Doe-Sheriff as the Acting Chairperson. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) CDC's Secretary General Eugene Nagbe announced to the press March 24 that the party's Acting Chairman Joshua Sackie resigned and the Executive Committee selected Geraldine Doe-Sheriff as Acting Chairman to replace him. Sackie immediately held a press conference to say that he had never resigned and the resignation letter Nagbe referred to was forged. He went on to explain that he had been asked to resign several times over policy issues and that George Weah had refused to speak to him for the last two years. Yet, as party bylaws stipulate that he can only be formally terminated during the party's annual convention, he said he intended to continue work until the next meeting in 2009. Sackie has gathered the support of some party leaders such as former NTGL Minister of Commerce Samuel Wlue, founding CDC member McDonald Wenton, and former party Chairman Bangalu Cole. He has filed a writ of injunction to the Supreme Court against the decision to remove him. It is not yet clear if the Court will hear the case before the 2009 convention.

13. (U) Former CDC presidential candidate and soccer star George Weah publicly recognized Geraldine Doe-Sheriff as Acting Chairman of the party on Liberian radio talk shows (via telephone from his residence in the U.S.). Weah pledged to continually support her chairmanship and has rallied many of the party's current executive membership, such as Eugene Nagbe and Milton Teahjay, behind Doe-Sheriff. Doe-Sheriff set up a shadow party management structure, which called both our Embassy and the NEC attempting to get recognition.

14. (U) The National Elections Commission (NEC) held a hearing April 15 to determine which party leadership it should acknowledge. NEC concluded that CDC's bylaws required a formal resignation or removal at the party's convention for an Acting Chairperson to be replaced. With neither a valid resignation letter nor a formal termination for Joshua Sackie, NEC decided it would continue to recognize him as Acting Chairman of CDC until the 2009 CDC convention.

15. (SBU) Following the NEC hearing, Milton Teahjay, an executive member of the CDC supporting Doe-Sheriff and former GOL official under Charles Taylor, condemned NEC and called for the removal of all its Commissioners. Teahjay said Fromayan and his colleagues were "incapable" of conducting credible elections. Teahjay's statement was condemned by ten other political parties.

16. (SBU) COMMENT. The power struggle within the CDC is threatening to hurt the party irreparably. As the CDC is the only opposition party with truly national appeal, its possible fracture into two separate parties could harm the opposition overall as a political force. (NOTE: Liberty Party fails to get much support outside of Grand Bassa County and is marginalizing some voters with recent radical stances on issues. END NOTE.) The lack of a credible

opposition gives the ruling Unity Party and the smaller parties aligned with it relatively more power as the country prepares for the 2011 presidential and legislative elections. NEC Chairman James Fromayan told PolOff privately that he considered the recent behavior of the CDC party childish and said, "That's exactly why we appreciate the political party strengthening programs the U.S. Embassy funds."

BOOTH